

You're in luck class. Today you are going to learn about the glorious features of our political system - freedom and democracy - without the hassle of experiencing either.



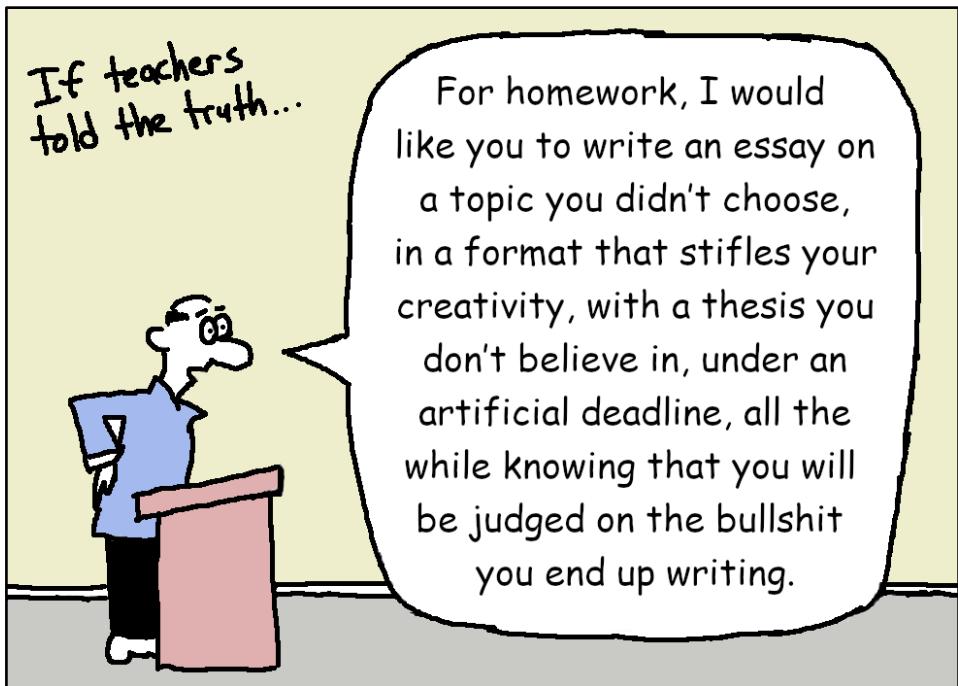
A DISORIENTATION GUIDE

WELCOME TO YOUR DISORIENTATION

“The most overwhelming reality of school is control. School controls the way you spend your time, how you behave, what you read, and to a large extent what you think.”

“All the time you are in school, you learn through experience how to live in a dictatorship. In school you shut your notebook when the bell rings. You do not speak unless granted permission. You are guilty until proven innocent, and who will prove you innocent? The most constant and thorough thing students in school experience – and learn – is the antithesis of democracy.”

-Grace Llewellyn



Grace Llewellyn

THE INSUFFERABLE Tedium OF SCHOOL

If you ever read any anthropology, one of the first things you notice is that primal cultures simmer up all their mystery and magic and ask their teenagers to drink deeply.

A sixteen-year-old Dakota boy fasts until an empowering vision overtakes him. A newly-menstruating Apache girl becomes the goddess White Painted Woman in an intense, joyful ceremony which lasts four days. All over the planet, traditional cultures provide ritual experiences to adolescents, bringing them into contact with the deepest parts of themselves and their heritage.

What do you get instead of vision? You get school – and all the blind passivity and grey monotone it trains into you.

For an institution to ask you, during some of your most magical years, to sit still and be good and read quietly for six or more hours each day is barely even thinkable, let alone tolerable. How do you feel when the sun comes out in March and makes the most golden Saturday imaginable, but you have to stay in and clean your room?

In case you've lost touch with your burgeoning beauty, let me remind you that that's exactly what's going on. Adolescence is a time of dreaming, adventure, risk, sweet wildness, and intensity. It's time for you to find yourself, or at least go looking. The sun is rising on your life. Your body is breaking out of its cocoon and ready to try wings. But you have to stay in – for such a long time – and keep your pencils sharpened.

It's no accident, I'm sure. The way our society is set up now, something's got to prevent visionary experience. People who are fully and permanently awakened to the wildness and beauty in and around them make lousy wage-slaves. People who are not distracted by a wellspring of yearnings can briskly assemble automobiles or focus their intellects on monthly sales charts.

Peter Gray

A PLACE FOR LEARNING?

By the time they are 11 or 12 years old, most [students] are realistically cynical about the idea that school is fundamentally a place for learning. They realize that much of what they are required to do is senseless and that they will forget most of what they are tested on shortly after the test.

They see little direct connection – because there usually is none – between their school assignments and the real world in which they live. They learn that their own questions and interests don't count. What counts are their abilities to provide the “correct” answers to questions that they did not ask and that do not interest them. [...]

To succeed, students must acquire just the limited information and shallow understanding that is needed to perform well on the tests; anything beyond that is wasted time.

What did you learn in
school today?



So much! I learned to hate
poetry. I learned to despise
the quadratic formula. And I
learned to loathe mitosis.



John Holt

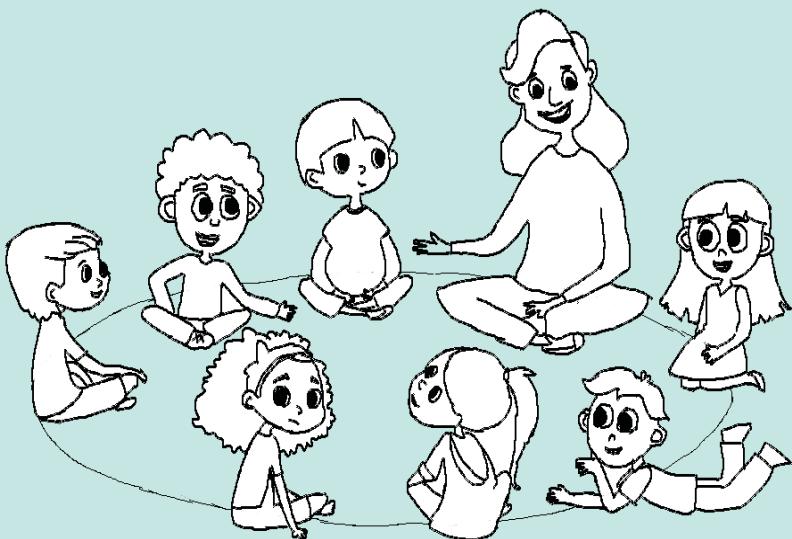
FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT

Next to the right to life itself, the most fundamental of all human rights is the right to control our own minds and thoughts. That means, the right to decide for ourselves how we will explore the world around us, think about our own and other person's experiences, and find and make meaning of our own lives.

Whoever takes that right away from us, as educators do, attacks the very center of our being and does us a most profound and lasting injury. They tell us, in effect, that we cannot be trusted even to think, that for all our lives we must depend on others to tell us the meaning of our world and our lives, and that any meaning we may make for ourselves, out of our own experience, has no value.

You are all amazing. Since being born, each one of you has been learning at an incredible pace, and you did it all without a teacher. But you just started school, so

THAT SHIT ENDS NOW!



Nikhil Goyal

BULLYING

Anti-bullying programs are based on the assumption that there is something intrinsically wrong with children and that their inclination to bully others is something that demands reforming by adults; if we somehow just teach them to be kinder to one another and to stop being bystanders when witnessing someone else being bullied, we'll solve the bullying issue in school.

That couldn't be more wrong.

Until the school environment is radically transformed, every anti-bullying initiative will fall flat. Virtually everyone who has commented on bullying in schools has committed a grave error by failing to draw a link between the design of schools—age segregation, prison-like atmosphere, authoritarian governing structure, and deprivation of freedom and rights—to the acts of aggression. Our schools are veritable petri dishes for bullying behavior.

“Children who are beaten will in turn give beatings, those who are intimidated will be intimidating, those who are humiliated will impose humiliation, and those whose souls are murdered will murder.”

Alice Miller

Alfie Kohn

CONDITIONAL LOVE

The best predictor of whether children will be able to accept themselves as fundamentally valuable and capable is the extent to which they have been accepted unconditionally by others... Those on the receiving end of conditional love – that is, affection based not on who they are but on what they do – come to disown the parts of themselves that aren't valued. Eventually they regard themselves as worthy only when they act in specific ways. [...]

This desperate strategy to gain acceptance is often associated with depression, a sense of hopelessness, and a tendency to lose touch with one's true self. At some point, such teenagers may not even know who they really are because they've had to work so hard to become something they're not.



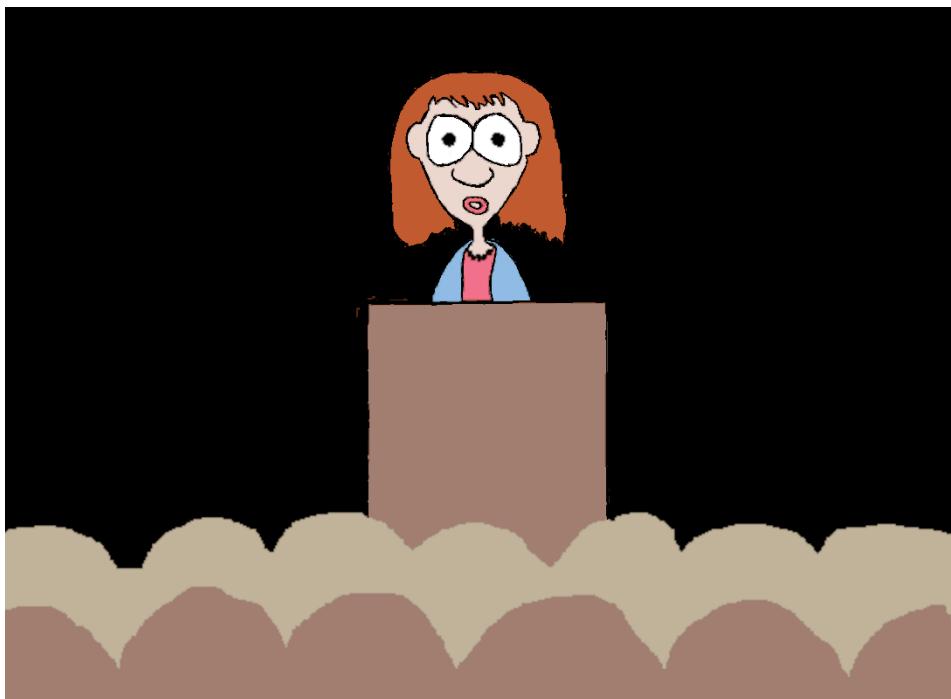
Way to go, son. Just a few points higher and you'll be worthy of love.

Alan Watts

THE RAT RACE

We are breeding a type of human being incapable of living in the present—that is, of really living. For unless one is able to live fully in the present, the future is a hoax. There is no point whatever in making plans for a future you will never be able to enjoy. When your plans mature, you will still be living for some other future beyond. You will never, never be able to sit back with full contentment and say, “Now, I’ve arrived!”

Your entire education has deprived you of this capacity because it was preparing you for the future, instead of showing you how to be alive now.



I know school is no fun, but let me tell you this. If you are willing to postpone your happiness for 50 more years, your retirement party is going to be **EPIC**.

Carol Black

WATCHED AND MEASURED

There is something profoundly deadening to a curious, engaged child about the feeling of being watched and measured, or even, some studies suggest, the anticipation of being measured. [...]

This business of being constantly scrutinized and compared to others does something insidious to the life of a child. I've seen kids drop what they're doing in an instant when they realize they're being observed in an appraising way. A wall goes up. The lights go out. As psychologist Peter Gray puts it,

"Evaluation, when it is not asked for, and when it has consequences as it does in school, is a threat. It narrows the mind... it inhibits new learning, new insights, and creative thought—the very processes that some people think school is supposed to promote."

For today's class, I will take the beautiful and awe-inspiring story of Macbeth, and I will mutilate it – by turning it into just another opportunity to evaluate you.

If teachers told the truth...



Noam Chomsky

OBEYING ORDERS

Most of the people who make it through the education system and get into the elite universities are able to do it because they've been willing to obey a lot of stupid orders for years and years – that's the way I did it, for example.

Like, you're told by some stupid teacher, "Do this," which you know makes no sense whatsoever, but you do it, and if you do it you get to the next rung, and then you obey the next order, and finally you work your way through and they give you your letters: an awful lot of education is like that, from the very beginning.

Some people go along with it because they figure, "Okay, I'll do any stupid thing that asshole says because I want to get ahead"; others do it because they've just internalized the values. But you do it, or else you're out: you ask too many questions and you're going to get in trouble.

Do you ever argue with authority figures?

Do you ever refuse to comply with illegitimate rules?

If you answered yes to either, you may have something called **OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT DISORDER**.



LUCKY FOR YOU, the world needs you now more than ever. So go out there, and do what you do best.

Lark

CONSUMED BY SCHOOL

There is something about being in school that makes you feel as if your whole life is consumed by it. You wake up at 6am (7am if you're lucky) and groggily pull yourself out of bed. Then comes the bus, the bells, the chatter, the tests, the anxiety, the boredom, the momentary elation, the bus again. After seven hours in the building, you have another two hours of homework and three hours of extracurriculars.

Life is utterly consumed by a stifled sense of living. There is no escape. You have to do this all again tomorrow.

Someday we ought to wake up to real life and realize that school was nothing but a mirage designed to trick us into believing that society must continue as it is. If we believe capitalism is killing the world, then why do we send children to a place that is meant to bring them into that grand fight against life and humanity? If we are in school, why do we still go to school? In a society so rotten, we often agree to rot with it to survive.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

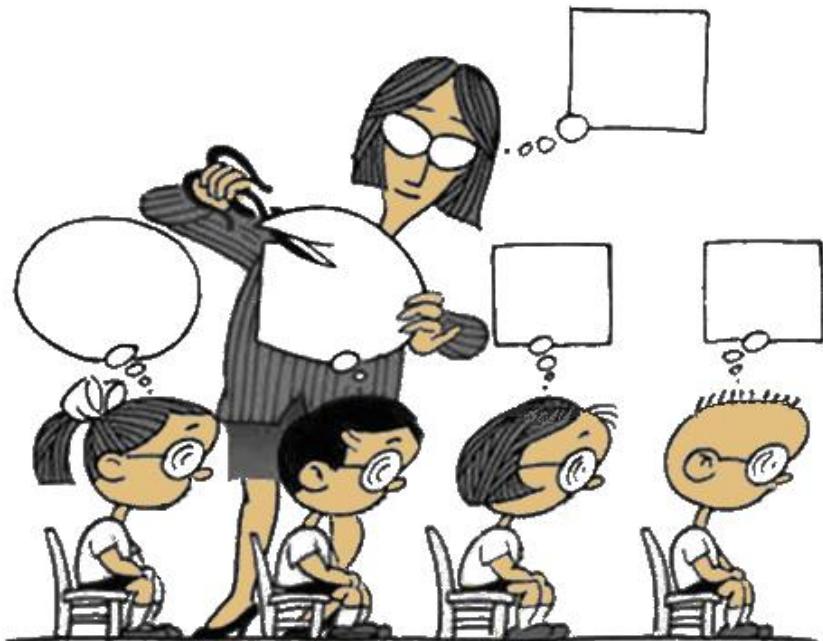
An honest, brave, compassionate human being.

No... I mean, how do you want to sell your labor?



"Our [educational system] is inherently oppressive. It's anti-black. It's anti-poor. It's anti-woman. It is not meant to empower. It is not meant to liberate. It pathologizes and confines. It's a pyramid scheme that guards against widespread access to resources, knowledge, power, and wealth."

Anthony Galloway

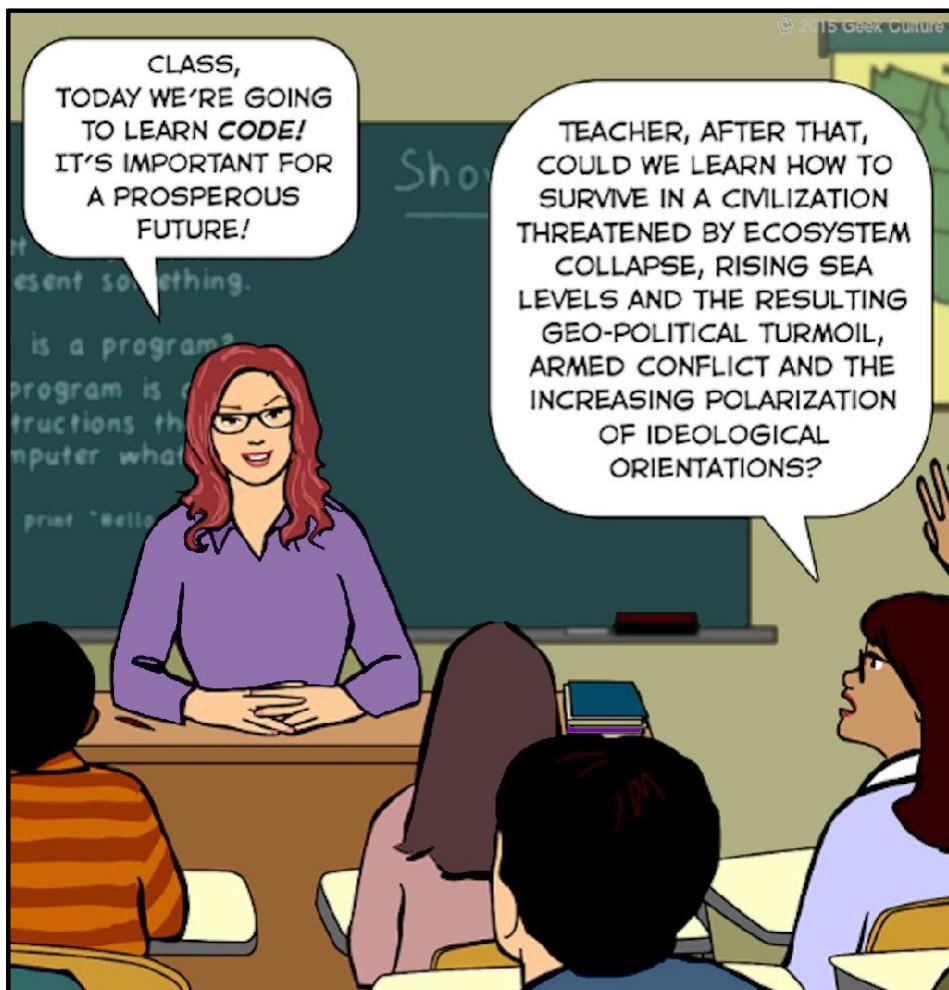


MINDFUCK

Ecosystems are collapsing. Inequality is rising. Our democracy is under threat. But incredibly, our schools are staying the same.

As a result, you are being trained for a future that will not exist. And even worse, your training is getting in the way of the lessons you actually need. Lessons in love, rebellion, and solidarity. Lessons in creating a livable future.

This is a mindfuck, to say the least. Because as civilization is racing off a cliff, you are stuck in school, filling out scantrons.



James Baldwin

A TRUE EDUCATION

The purpose of education... is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity.

But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish. The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it – at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change.

“Whatever an education is, it must empower you to lead your own life. It must minimize your chances of being manipulated, of being made a pawn, of being an actor in someone else’s play.”

Blake Boles

One of school's main functions is to sort students into winners and losers.

But that is unacceptable.

Because if we don't join together soon,
we will all become losers.

If you graduate from Yale,
you will be set for life.*

* which may not be long due
to democratic collapse.
Sorry about that.



Civil disobedience is not our problem.

Our problem is civil obedience.

Howard Zinn

If standing up for humanity is against the rules,
then the rules must be broken.

Greta Thunberg

It would be nice if disruption wasn't necessary.
It would be nice if we lived in a functional democracy
where the fears and dreams of young people were not
routinely ignored. But that is not the world we were
born into, and we will no longer be ignored.

Anonymous

Don't ask what will happen. Be what happens.

Rebecca Solnit

